

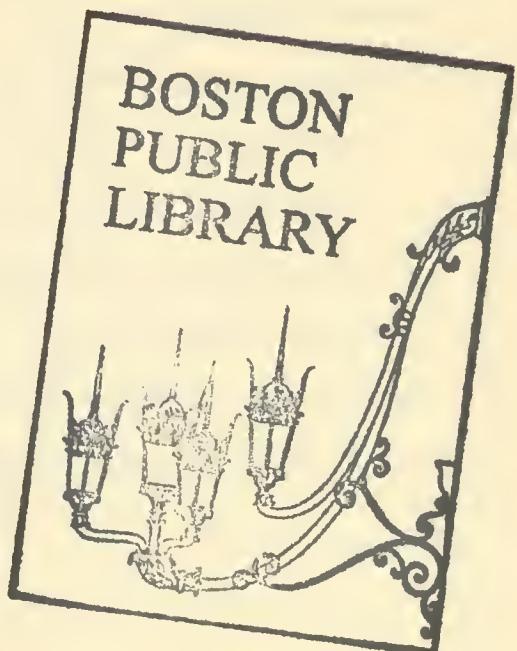
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A REPORT ON PLANNING STUDIES
FOR THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

Summarizing the Planning Studies
and Reports on the CBD since 1958

Boston Redevelopment Authority
Planning Department
October, 1965





INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the planning history of the Central Business District area. The development of a plan for this vital area of Boston has been a continuous process, starting from the broader general studies of the entire downtown and culminating in specific proposed actions within definitive project areas. A chronology of recent planning work begins with the background studies which were made for the 1960 "A General Plan for the Central Business District" under the auspices of the Boston City Planning Board.

The physical area included in the studies of downtown Boston varies. In general: The Regional Core is described as that portion of the Boston peninsula which is east of the proposed Inner Belt alignment; the Central Business District 1960 is the 875 acre retail, office and institutional district from North Station to Massachusetts Avenue; the Downtown GNRP, the General Neighborhood Renewal Plan area, encompassing the financial-office, retail and general commercial district from State Street to Stuart-Kneeland Street; the present Central Business District Urban Renewal Project is a 245 acre portion of the larger GNRP, which contains the major retail stores, the South Station, part of the older office and financial district, the garment manufacturers, much of the nighttime entertainment facilities and Park Square.

The planning studies carried out to date have been based on an evaluation of the present conditions, trends and projections. Goals and planning objectives have been established and alternative means of implementation have been weighed. The proposed public actions emanating from these studies are the result of careful decisions made within the framework of the over-all planning process.

SUMMARY OF PLANNING STUDIES FOR THE CBD

I. "A GENERAL PLAN FOR THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT," Boston City Planning Board, 1960

In the late 1950's, the Boston City Planning Board undertook the development of this general plan as a first step toward obtaining corrective action for rebuilding the CBD. The report was issued for the purpose of promoting discussion, soliciting suggestions, and establishing a basic guideline for the tremendous task of renewing the core of Boston. The premise was that the CBD, despite its many problems, should increase in importance as the dominant center of an expanding metropolitan area.

Background studies for this report included comprehensive analyses of present conditions - economics, assets, problems, trends, land use statistics, and transportation facilities. Ten basic objectives were evolved to guide proposed improvement actions:

1. To strengthen the Central Business District as the vital center of the Boston Metropolitan Area
2. To conserve present investment in sound buildings, in sound activities, and in public improvements
3. To encourage new investment
4. To make the CBD more accessible to more people
5. To improve communications within the CBD
6. To bring together related activities
7. To separate incompatible activities
8. To increase public safety
9. To improve the appearance of the CBD
10. To preserve the unique character of Boston

The "General Plan for the Central Business District" went on to illustrate how some of the basic objectives could be met. Recommendations for a reorganization of the local street system and the development of large off-street parking terminals were seen as a prerequisite for the encouragement of new private investment in the CBD. South

Station and other key locations along the high capacity expressway system were proposed for major garage sites. The reorganization of the existing major street system included proposed street closings, widenings, and realignments. Within the retail core, improvements were outlined for various intersections along Washington Street, including: Boylston-Essex, Franklin-Bromfield and School Streets. These street improvements were proposed to simplify the intersections, thus increasing their traffic capacities, and at the same time, reducing the conflicts between the pedestrians and vehicles.

"A General Plan for the Central Business District" was released on December 21, 1960, by the Boston Redevelopment Authority for general information and review. It also served as a revision to that portion of the 1951 General Plan for Boston which deals with the CBD.

II. THE DOWNTOWN GENERAL NEIGHBORHOOD RENEWAL PLAN

The Downtown GNRP is one of ten GNRP areas in the City delineated by the Boston Redevelopment Authority for general planning as part of the over-all development program. The BRA staff and a number of special consultants made an extensive study of existing conditions in the GNRP. During the GNRP planning phase, the following consultants participated:

Traffic

Robert C. Blumenthal Associates made a study to relate the Massachusetts Turnpike Extension plans to the local street system, a portion of which affects the Downtown GNRP.

The firm of Wilbur Smith and Associates was retained to make various traffic studies, traffic counts, a street capacity analyses, and to react to the proposed GNRP circulation scheme as it was developed.

Engineering

Charles A. Maguire & Associates made a preliminary analysis of the existing public utilities. This study included establishing the location, existing conditions and major replacement needs of the public utility system in the Downtown GNRP.

Economics

Robert Gladstone analyzed the existing and potential market for all major land use categories in the Downtown GNRP.

These studies resulted in a series of reports, tabulations and maps which gave a comprehensive picture of the various elements which make up the downtown area. Information on existing conditions was prepared by the BRA staff, including:

Reports -

Functional Areas
Building Conditions
Land Use Inventory
Circulation
Historic Sites
Topography and Subsoil Conditions

Maps -

Vehicular & Pedestrian Movement
Traffic Lights & Street Widths
Off-Street Parking Capacity
Topography
Functional Areas
Historic Sites
Building Types
Existing Building Condition
Assessed Building Value
Assessed Land Value
Subsoil Conditions
Existing Utilities Series
 Edison Electric Co.
 New England Telephone & Telegraph Co.
 Boston Gas Co.
Subway System
Building Heights
Building Heights Generalized
Traffic Volume

The General Neighborhood Renewal Plan was completed and submitted to the Federal Government in the Spring of 1965. It provides

the basic framework for the detailed survey and planning studies for the CBD Urban Renewal Project.

The planning proposals in the GNRP are not radically different from those proposed by the earlier "General Plan for the Central Business District" of 1960. The same basic objectives are common to both plans. The GNRP, however, is more specific on the matter of programming implementation of plans for the CBD through a series of Urban Renewal actions. Where the earlier plan established a framework of worthwhile goals for the future of downtown Boston, the GNRP outlines the more specific attainment of those goals in an economically feasible plan.

The GNRP places a high priority on the establishment of a clear circulation system and development of off-street parking facilities which are well-related to the major traffic arteries and the activity centers. Many relatively minor street realignments are proposed which will, when viewed as part of the larger local street system, provide improved efficiency and significant clarification of the street pattern.

The redevelopment of the South Station area to provide for a major parking terminal and new commercial development is a basic proposal of the GNRP. The present land area at South Station is underutilized at present, yet it is ideally located at the juncture of the Central Artery (Inner Belt) and the Massachusetts Turnpike terminus, and can become a major impetus for the renewal of the entire eastern flank of the CBD. The GNRP envisions this new development of South Station as a key magnet for the growth of the retail core down Summer Street.

III. 1965/1975 GENERAL PLAN FOR THE CITY OF BOSTON AND THE REGIONAL CORE

As the Downtown GNRP work progressed, a concurrent planning effort was being made by the BRA Planning Staff to produce the 1965/1975 General Plan for the City of Boston and the Regional Core.

The main function of this document is to provide a general statement of policies and objectives for a feasible development program during the next decade. It provides guidelines for revisions of the City's zoning laws, establishes a public facilities development program, and establishes a general plan for the formulation of all future renewal projects.

The General Plan emphasizes the importance of improved circulation and strategically placed large parking structures to the future growth of retail and office functions in the CBD. The South Station area is proposed for a large parking garage, integrated with public transportation to encourage development of the adjacent area.

The General Plan for the City of Boston and the Regional Core was adopted by the Boston Redevelopment Authority in March, 1965, and supersedes the 1951 General Plan as amended by the 1960 "A General Plan for the Central Business District."

IV. CBD STAGE I REPORT to The Committee for the Central Business District, Inc., Victor Gruen Associates, May, 1963

In June, 1962, The Committee for the Central Business District, Inc. was incorporated. This group opened offices at 38 Chauncy Street and executed a contract with Victor Gruen Associates to proceed with planning studies for the CBD. As part of the contractual agreement,

Victor Gruen Associates produced a Stage I Report which summarized their findings and outlined their recommended conceptual plan for the project.

The report stressed improved accessibility as a prime prerequisite for the revitalization of the CBD. Accessibility to and within the CBD must be achieved by placing a high degree of importance on the use of Mass Transportation facilities. At the same time, a reorganization of the parking facilities must occur to take full advantage of the expressway system as means of access for shoppers and visitors.

In the Stage I Report, Victor Gruen recognizes the potential value of the South Station as follows:

"South Station Terminal: The projected New England Turnpike Extension into the Core area makes the construction of a major car storage facility in this area mandatory and a further large number of parking spaces would become usefully active if the Central Artery could be freed from at least part of the present through traffic. We believe that the construction of about 7,000 car spaces should be considered in this area but we recommend urgently that South Station Terminal should be developed as a terminal for Mass Transportation as well as for Individualized Transportation. We recommend that the establishment of a long-distance and regional bus terminal should be studied. By the construction of such bus terminal, the existing bus terminal facilities within the Core which create disturbances could be removed. We further feel that South Station should continue to be a terminal for commuter trains. We also believe that the South Station area could become a terminal for waterbound traffic and that by using it thus as a multi-purpose terminal, it could gain sufficient importance as an entrance gate to the entire Core area, and thereby justifying the construction of internal Core Mass Transportation Facilities connecting the South Station Terminal with the heart of the Core area."

The conflict between pedestrians and vehicles in the CBD, and most notably in the retail center, is seen as one of the most detrimental conditions contributing to the environmental blight of the area.

Simplification of the awkward street intersections along heavy pedestrian routes, such as Washington Street, would go a long way toward the realization of an improved environment for pedestrians as well as vehicles within the CBD.

V. CBD URBAN RENEWAL PLANNING

The Survey and Planning Application for the CBD was approved by the URA in March, 1963. Since that time, the BRA staff has been working with their consultants and The Committee for the Central Business District, Inc. to produce an Urban Renewal Plan for the project area. The consultants to the BRA are:

Planning

The planning firm of Victor Gruen Associates has been retained jointly by the Boston Redevelopment Authority and The Committee for the Central Business District, Inc. to make recommendations and prepare plans for the redevelopment and renewal of the Central Business District.

Traffic

Barton-Aschman Associates, Inc., Traffic and Transportation Engineers, have been contracted by the Authority to conduct studies, make analyses and to work jointly with the staff of the Authority and its consultants in providing a circulation plan for the Central Business District.

Engineering

Chas. T. Main, Inc. has been hired as consultant on engineering problems relating to the development of the UR Plan. They are in the process of studying various utilities systems in the project area and will be involved in preparing plans and estimates for improvements to be made when the project enters the execution phase.

Economics

Robert Gladstone has been contracted to study the existing market for all major land uses in the Central Business District, to prepare market projections for development, and to test plan proposals.

The BRA staff and consultants have conducted various surveys and field studies to gain detailed information about the project area to be used in preparing the renewal plan. An on-site analysis of each building was made to determine the present use and occupancy of each floor. Building conditions were examined by inspection on a structure-by-structure basis by the engineering consultants, Chas. T. Main, Inc., and the BRA staff. Interviews were conducted with numerous persons in the CBD to determine the major problems as seen by the business community. The traffic consultants, Barton-Aschman Associates, Inc., with the BRA staff and the Boston Traffic Department, made extensive traffic counts, truck loading studies, and conducted origin and destination interviews. Special engineering studies have also been made. The economic consultant, Robert Gladstone, has kept close to the market situation and advised the planners at regular intervals. All of these activities, and many less complex studies, have been of assistance to the BRA staff in the preparation of an Urban Renewal Plan.

LIST OF REPORTS:

"A General Plan for the Central Business District" - Boston City Planning Board, 1960

"Background Material for Downtown Urban Renewal Planning" - Boston Redevelopment Authority, August 1962

(a package of 8 reports and 17 maps summarizing the previous planning proposals and existing conditions)

"Downtown General Neighborhood Renewal Plan" - Mass. R-46

"General Plan for the City of Boston and the Regional Core 1965/1975" - Boston Redevelopment Authority, March 1965

"Downtown Boston, Market Studies for Urban Renewal" - Robert Gladstone, May 1963

"Stage I Report to The Committee for the Central Business District, Inc." - Victor Gruen Associates

(These documents are attached to the record copy of this report and are available for inspection at the offices of the BRA in City Hall Annex)

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